

“UNIVERSAL HISTORY OF THE CHARACTERS OF LETTERS AND LANGUAGES”: AN UNKNOWN MANUSCRIPT BY ATHANASIUS KIRCHER

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1. Introduction

A previously unknown manuscript by the Jesuit scholar Athanasius Kircher (1601/2–1680) contains an outline for a multivolume work entitled *Characterum literarum linguarumque totius universi historia universalis* (Universal history of the characters of letters and languages of the whole world).¹ The outline is conserved at the Vatican Library in Barb. Lat. 2617, a volume of miscellaneous manuscripts, and covers both sides of two leaves (figs. 1–4).² The original enclosing sheet identifies the contents as “a short plan or ideal sketch of the undertaken work.”³ The manuscript is in Kircher’s hand and is signed by him but is not listed under his name in the index of the Fondo Barberini, which explains why it has hitherto escaped notice. Kircher’s authorship probably eluded the compiler of the index because his name appears on neither the first nor the last of its four sides, but only on the second-to-last. Following introductory comments, this article provides a transcription of the Latin text, with facsimiles of the original document, followed by an English translation.

The document is undated, but circumstantial evidence indicates that the outline was written early in Kircher’s career, close to the time of his arrival in Rome in November 1633 and before his composition of *Prodromus Coptus*, published in 1636. The foremost reason for such a dating is the way Kircher signed his name: “Athanasio Kircher Buchonio,” referring to Buchonia, the region in the Upper Rhineland where he was born and raised. This is precisely how Kircher identified himself on the title page of the *Primitiae catoptricae gnomonicae*, published in Avignon in 1635, although the manuscript presumably was completed before he left France in September 1633. He does not use this form in any of his other published works. His earliest publication, *Ars magnesia* (Würzburg 1631), did not provide a geographical epithet. In subsequent publications, from *Prodromus Coptus* (Rome 1636) to *Ars magna lucis et umbrae* (Rome 1646), he added the name of his hometown, Fulda, consistently identifying himself as Athanasius Kircher “Fuldensis-Buchonius.” His *Musurgia universalis* (Rome 1650) featured a solitary “Fuldensis.” Thereafter, beginning with *Obeliscus Pamphilius* (published later in 1650), he ceased to use any geographical epithet.⁴ This evidence suggests that the outline was probably composed before *Prodromus Coptus*.

¹ Recent years have seen a flurry of Kircher scholarship. In English, two very good overviews of his life and work are Godwin 2009 and Findlen 2004.

² BAV Barb. Lat. 2617, fols. 33–34. The codex includes another, indexed text by Kircher (fols. 40–41), a report on the location of the ancient city of Alessio, which appears with similar reports by Lucas Holstenius and Hieronymus Pastritius, under the title “De situ Civitatis Alessii allegatio-

nes.” All three are in the same hand (not Kircher’s). They are undated, but the enclosing page that once wrapped them is dated 12 March 1654. BAV Barb. Lat. 2617, fols. 40–49.

³ BAV Barb. Lat. 2617, fol. 35r.

⁴ In the poems that Kircher contributed to Bouchard 1638, published the same year, he signed himself simply “Fuldensis.”

Other considerations support a date at least that early. If, as I argue below, the outline shows the influence of Claude Duret and Blaise de Vigenère, it is significant that Kircher was interested in both authors during his first months in Rome, as testified by a letter that he wrote in December 1633, asking Nicolas-Claude Fabri de Peiresc to send him copies of their books.⁵ Furthermore, it seems unlikely that Kircher would have conceived such an ambitious, all-consuming project—and one that subsumed his hieroglyphic studies—after he had embarked on *Oedipus Aegyptiacus*, his magnum opus on that topic, which he had conceived by February 1635.⁶ His failure to mention Coptic at the conclusion of the outline among the Oriental languages from whose literature he intended to extract the content of the *Historia universalis* suggests that he prepared the outline before immersing himself in the study of that language in the middle of 1634.⁷

The fact that the manuscript is formally signed, combined with the ornamental handwriting of the title, suggests a presentation copy. Given the probable date of its composition and its provenance (the Fondo Barberini), I think it likely that Kircher prepared the outline as a research proposal to present to Cardinal Francesco Barberini, his patron during his first years in Rome. Perhaps he presented it to the cardinal before or during their first meeting in November 1633, during which they discussed the interpretation of hieroglyphs, the Kabbalah, and Arabic literature.⁸ I have not come across any mention of the project in Kircher's correspondence (for example, he never mentions it in his surviving letters to Peiresc), which suggests that the plan was short-lived.⁹

As a proposal for a single work, the *Historia universalis* was stupefyingly ambitious, in the tradition of baroque polymathy.¹⁰ In the first volume alone, Kircher promised to write about

the universal history of languages, their origin, variety, corruption, from the mixing of peoples, the affinity of one to another, and also the characters of each language; together with the grammatical rules and vocabularies of all languages flourishing in this age in the entire world, arranged briefly, efficiently, and by a new and extraordinary method for teaching anyone in a short time, together with other marvelous things relating to this subject.

A table at the end of the outline listed seventy languages, organized by geographical region, that Kircher would treat, most of which he optimistically (if enigmatically) described as either “already possessed” or “easily to be had.” Five subsequent volumes were to be devoted to: the mysteries of

⁵ Kircher to Peiresc, Rome, 1 December 1633, BNP FF 9538, fol. 234r. From this letter, Kircher appeared to be familiar with the books from his time in France, and he directed Peiresc to the bookseller in Avignon who could provide copies.

⁶ See Kircher to Peiresc, Rome, 8 February 1635, BNP FF 9362, fol. 15r.

⁷ Coptic does appear in the list of languages to be treated in book one, which is given on the final page of the outline. Significantly, Kircher used the form *Coptitica*. In his published works on Coptic, Kircher used this form only to refer to the Copts as people and used the form *Copta* to identify the language—again suggesting that he composed the outline before embarking seriously on the study of that language.

⁸ Kircher to Peiresc, Rome, 1 December 1633, BNP FF 9538, fol. 234r. After the meeting, Kircher was charged by the cardinal with a project much narrower than the *Historia*

universalis: translating an Arabic manuscript about the hieroglyphs and interpreting the inscriptions on several Roman obelisks. See Stolzenberg forthcoming, chap. 2.

⁹ Alegambe's 1643 entry on Kircher lists among his forthcoming works a certain *Linguarum omnium, quas auctor callet, methodicae instructiones*. The title suggests a more modest version of book one of the *Historia Universalis*, “all the languages in the world” being replaced by “all the languages which the author knows.” Alegambe and Rivadeneira 1643, 48–49.

¹⁰ For example, compare Kircher's project to Peter Lambeck's similarly audacious and unrealized plan to write “A literary history, containing a general narrative of the origin, rise, transformation, fall, and restoration of all the languages, sciences, faculties, and liberal arts, in chronological order through all the centuries, with a special account of famous men and women.” Morhof, *Polyhistor* 1.2, as quoted in Grafton 1985, 41.

Egyptian hieroglyphs; cryptography and steganography; the Kabbalah; superstitious magic and the great art of Ramon Llull; and the divinatory arts.

Although Kircher did not carry out the *Historia universalis* as such, it is striking how many of the projects that he eventually realized during his long career were already conceived at this early date. The origin and diffusion of languages, which was to have been discussed in part one, “The Confusion of Babel,” became the subject matter of Kircher’s last work, *Turris Babel* (Amsterdam 1679). Part two, “The Egyptian Labyrinth,” was to contain the hieroglyphic studies that instead took form as *Oedipus Aegyptiacus* (Rome 1652–1654) and other works. The description of the third “steganographic-cryptological” volume points toward his *Polygraphia nova et universalis* (Rome 1663), combining as it does a kind of universal language scheme with a defense of Trithemian cryptography. The study of the Kabbalah, designated for the fourth part, appeared as a lengthy treatise within *Oedipus Aegyptiacus*, although as late as 1646 Kircher intended to publish an independent work on the subject.¹¹ The condemnations of illicit magic and divination in books five and six of the *Historia universalis* also correspond to sections of *Oedipus Aegyptiacus*, as well as to other works, notably *Arithmologia* (Rome 1665), which was devoted to magical seals. The Lullist combinatory art, which was to be treated in book five, became the subject of *Ars magna sciendi*, published in 1669 in Amsterdam.

Kircher’s projected *Universal History of the Characters of Letters and Languages of the Whole World* would have encapsulated a lifetime of scholarship in a single, audacious, if unrealizable, book. From lists of forthcoming works by Kircher published in Alegambe’s Jesuit bibliography of 1643 and at the end of the 1646 edition of *Ars magna lucis et umbrae* it was previously known that Kircher had conceived many of his future works by the mid-1640s.¹² The outline of the *Historia universalis* pushes back the conception of many of those projects by a decade. But it should not be taken as evidence that Kircher did not evolve intellectually. Even as he went on to realize individual components of the *Historia universalis*, his research took on a new character. For example, the strong influence of antiquarian scholarship that characterized Kircher’s publications about Egyptian hieroglyphs and ancient magic was absent from the outline, suggesting that his approach changed under the influence of the antiquarian scholarly milieu that he joined when he moved to Rome at the end of 1633.¹³ Similarly, the outline’s description of the Kabbalah emphasized natural magic based on the doctrine of signatures, in contrast to Kircher’s treatise, “Cabala Hebraeorum,” in *Oedipus Aegyptiacus*, which more accurately reflected authentic Jewish traditions.¹⁴

The project at the nucleus of Kircher’s *Historia universalis*, to comprehensively describe the world’s languages, reached back to the sixteenth century.¹⁵ In *Mithridates* (1555) Conrad Gesner had examined “the different languages both of the ancients and those used today among the various nations of the entire world,” setting the template for subsequent works, among them, Claude Duret’s *Thresor de l’histoire des langues de cest univers* (1613; second edition, 1619).¹⁶ Kircher read and annotated Duret’s book, whose influence may be detected in his title, “Universal history of the characters of letters and languages of the whole world,” which seems to play on Duret’s “Treasury of the history of the languages of this world.”¹⁷ Kircher’s description of the first volume,

¹¹ See the list of forthcoming publications at the end of Kircher 1646, n.p., after index.

¹² See the citation in previous note and Alegambe and Rivadeneira 1643, 48–49.

¹³ See Stolzenberg forthcoming.

¹⁴ On Kircher’s treatment of the Kabbalah, see Schmidt-

Biggemann 2007; Stolzenberg 2004.

¹⁵ On linguistic scholarship in this period, see Droixhe 1987; Droixhe 1978; Céard 1980.

¹⁶ Gesner 1555; Duret 1619.

¹⁷ A copy of Duret’s *Thresor* that once belonged to the library of the Collegio Romano (now Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale

“The Confusion of Babel,” echoes Duret’s subtitle: “containing the origins, beauties, perfections, declines, mutations, changes, conversions, and destructions of languages”; and the list of languages at the end of Kircher’s outline bears comparison to the similar list on the title page of Duret’s book. (Unlike Duret, however, Kircher did not include the languages of birds and animals and added a category of “the invented languages of certain nations.”)¹⁸ Kircher’s classification of languages into groups, each headed by a “mother” language (“Hebraea mater,” “Latina mater,” “Germanica mater,” etc.) owed a debt to Joseph Scaliger and Abraham Mylius, the first scholars to organize languages into families based on linguistic similarities, which they attributed to a common mother language, or *lingua matrix*.¹⁹

“Character” served as the linking concept that united the various parts of Kircher’s projected work. Alphabets, hieroglyphs, ciphers, natural signatures, Kabbalistic symbols, magical figures, the letters of the Lullist combinatory art: all fell within the scope of his “universal history.” That alphabets should be given so central a place in the study of language was typical of early modern scholarship, which often assumed a deeper relationship between languages and writing systems than recognized by modern linguistics. The prominence of alphabets in works on the history and diversity of languages was due in part to accessibility—even in the absence of linguistic understanding, a language, as instantiated by its script, could be possessed between the covers of a book—as well as the exotic appeal of unfamiliar characters. But it was also related to widespread beliefs about their magical properties, rooted in the notion that at least some writing systems were of supernatural origin. Take, for example, Guillaume Postel’s *Linguarum duodecim characteribus differentium alphabetum introductio* (1538) and Teseo Ambrogio’s *Introductio in Chaldaicam linguam, Syriacam atque Armenicam et decem alias linguas characterum differentium* (1539), the foundational texts of Oriental philology, as well as two of the earliest studies of comparative linguistics.²⁰ As indicated by their titles, Postel and Ambrogio privileged alphabets in their treatment of Near Eastern languages, an emphasis that was related to their shared interest in the Kabbalah. Ambrogio’s *Introductio*, followed by later works like Blaise de Vigenère’s *Traicté des chiffres, ou secrètes manières d’écrire* (1587) and Duret’s *Thresor* moved freely between expositions of genuine alphabets and ones that today would be considered imaginary, such as the characters supposedly written by demons and attributed to Ludovico, magician of Split,²¹ the magical alphabets of Solomon, Appolonius of Tyana, and Vergil the philosopher,²² or the kabbalistic alphabet of the angel Raziel.²³ Vigenère’s treatise, which brought together topics such as hieroglyphs, the Kabbalah, and cryptography under the rubric of “secret ways of writing,” may well have inspired Kircher’s expansive use of “character” as a principle for organizing diverse domains of knowledge.

The six volumes of Kircher’s *Historia universalis* brought together the primary strands that Paolo Rossi identified as facets of the early modern revival of Lullism: “the cabala and hieroglyphic writing, artificial and universal languages, the search for the primary constitutive principles of all possible knowledge, the art of memory and a preoccupation with logic understood as a ‘key’ to the

di Roma 6.1E.5) contains many annotations in Kircher’s hand, largely in sections pertaining to the Kabbalah. Kircher cited Duret in both *Prodromus Coptus* (e.g., 113, 215) and *Oedipus Aegyptiacus* (e.g., 2.1, 117) and also borrowed from the *Thresor* without citation (e.g., *Prodromus Coptus*, 133; *Thresor*, 380; *Oedipus Aegyptiacus* 2.1, 107; *Thresor*, 119).

¹⁸ Duret 1619.

¹⁹ Scaliger 1610, 119–122; Mylius 1612.

²⁰ Postel 1538; Albonesi 1539.

²¹ Postel and Ambrogio, who became friends through their mutual interest in Oriental languages, corresponded on the subject of this and other magical or otherwise unusual alphabets. See the letters printed at the end of Albonesi 1539, 192ff.

²² Vigenère 1587, 327v–329r.

²³ Duret 1619, 117.

hidden secrets of reality.”²⁴ As such, it offers support for Thomas Leinkauf’s claim that the Lullist combinatory method was basic to the underlying structure of Kircher’s thought.²⁵ At the same time, the proposed work’s title and some of its subject matter call to mind the tradition of *historia litteraria*, a genre of early modern scholarship that aimed to provide readers with comprehensive, encyclopedic overviews of the totality of human knowledge by narrating human history through the lense of *littera*, meaning literature or textual productions.²⁶ One might describe Kircher’s proposed work as a *historia litteraria* based on a Lullist rather than a humanist connotation of “letters.”

2. Document²⁷

Athanasius Kircher, *Characterum literarum linguarumque totius universi historia universalis*. BAV Barb. Lat. 2617, fols. 33r–35v.

[fol. 33r; fig. 1]

Characterum Literarum
Linguarumque totius
universi
HISTORIA UNIVERSALIS
in 6. Tomos distributa
quorum tituli
sequuntur

Tomus 1. Confusio Babel
Tomus 2. Labyrinthus Aegyptiacus
Tomus 3. Steganographus Criptologus
Tomus 4. Cabalicus Philosophicus Mysticus
Tomus 5. Disquistorius Magicus
Tomus 6. Theologicus Historicus

TOMUS PRIMUS
seu
Confusio Babel

Discutit universam linguarum historiam, originem, varietatem, corruptionem, e commistione gentium, affinitatem unius ad alteram characteres quoque uniuscuiusque linguae proprios: una cum praeceptis Grammaticalibus et Lexicis linguarum omnium hoc saeculo in toto orbe terrarum vigentium, brevi expeditâ & ad unamquamque exiguo tempore adiscendam methodo novâ et rarâ dispositis

²⁴ Rossi 2000, 29.

²⁵ Leinkauf 1993.

²⁶ See Kelley 1999.

²⁷ I wish to thank the anonymous reviewer who suggested improved readings of the Latin text. Unfortunately, Kircher was not as brilliant a Latinist as the reviewer, so a few solecisms remain. I have refrained from the use of “*sic*,” as the reader may compare the transcription to the facsimiles in figures 1–4.

[fol. 33v; fig. 2]

una cum aliis rebus admirandis [ad] hanc materiam concurrentibus.

Tomus Secundus

Labyrinthus Aegyptiacus

Tradit difficile illam et hactenus incognitam Hieroglyphicorum historiam, Literarum hactenus ignorabilium, characterum dico Aegyptiacorum Lectionem ex ignoratis et absconditis linguarum thesauris erutam, eorumque characterum mysteria sub symbolis et parabolis hucusque latentibus delegit et enodat.

Tomus Tertius

Στεγανόγραφος κρυπτολόγος

In quo de verâ secreto et impenetrabiliter scribendi loquendive ratione et methodo ad quodvis etiam intervalli spatium possibili tractatur. Methodum Trithemianam in steganographia sua promissam veram esse et omni suspicionis labe carentem clare et in praxis demonstrabitur. Item qua ratione quilibet etiam imperitus omni linguarum genere epistolas conscribere possit, et eadem methodo scriptas intelligere, panditur. Ostenduntur in hoc parte multa naturae mysteria & mathematicarum secreta recondita. Res certa et infallibilis omni instantiâ et praesumptione carens, sed continuo et indefesso studio et experientia tandem divina bonitate favente adinventata.

Tomus Quartus

Cabalicus Philosophicus Mysticus

In quo tractatur de vera Cabalae utriusque *בראשית* et *מרכבה* seu quod idem est naturalis et supernaturalis sapientiae Hebraeorum doctrinâ ex abstrusioribus philosophiae Hebraicae fontibus petita et demonstrata. In cuius prima parte agitur de physiognomia rerum omnium naturalium ut Animalium, plantarum, lapidum per characteres ~~eorum~~ iis ab Authore naturae impressos.

[fol. 34r; fig. 3]

Tractatur in hac parte quoque de signaturis rerum omnium naturalium Cabalisticis, chemicis, Botanicis, de 3 mundorum ordine et dependentia multa curiosè tractantur, cum refutatione tamen, omnis Cabalae superstiosae indoctis modo usitatae. In 2.da de symbolica et mystica Heb: theologia

Tomus Quintus

Disquisitorius Magicus

In quo primo omnia supersticiosae characteristicae Cabalae fundamenta convelluntur. Activitas figurarum, sigillorumque contra Coclenium, Gaffarellum, Burgrafium, Mizaldum, aliosque characterolatrias refutatur; Amuletorum ex Hebraeorum[,] Arabum, Chaldaeorum, Persarum, Indorum, Afrorum, Europaeorumque officina superstitionis depromptorum, nullitas apertè demonstratur. Raymundi Lulli ars magna examinatur, methodous facilis ostenditur ad facilem totius *ἐγκυκλοπαιδείας* acquisitionem.

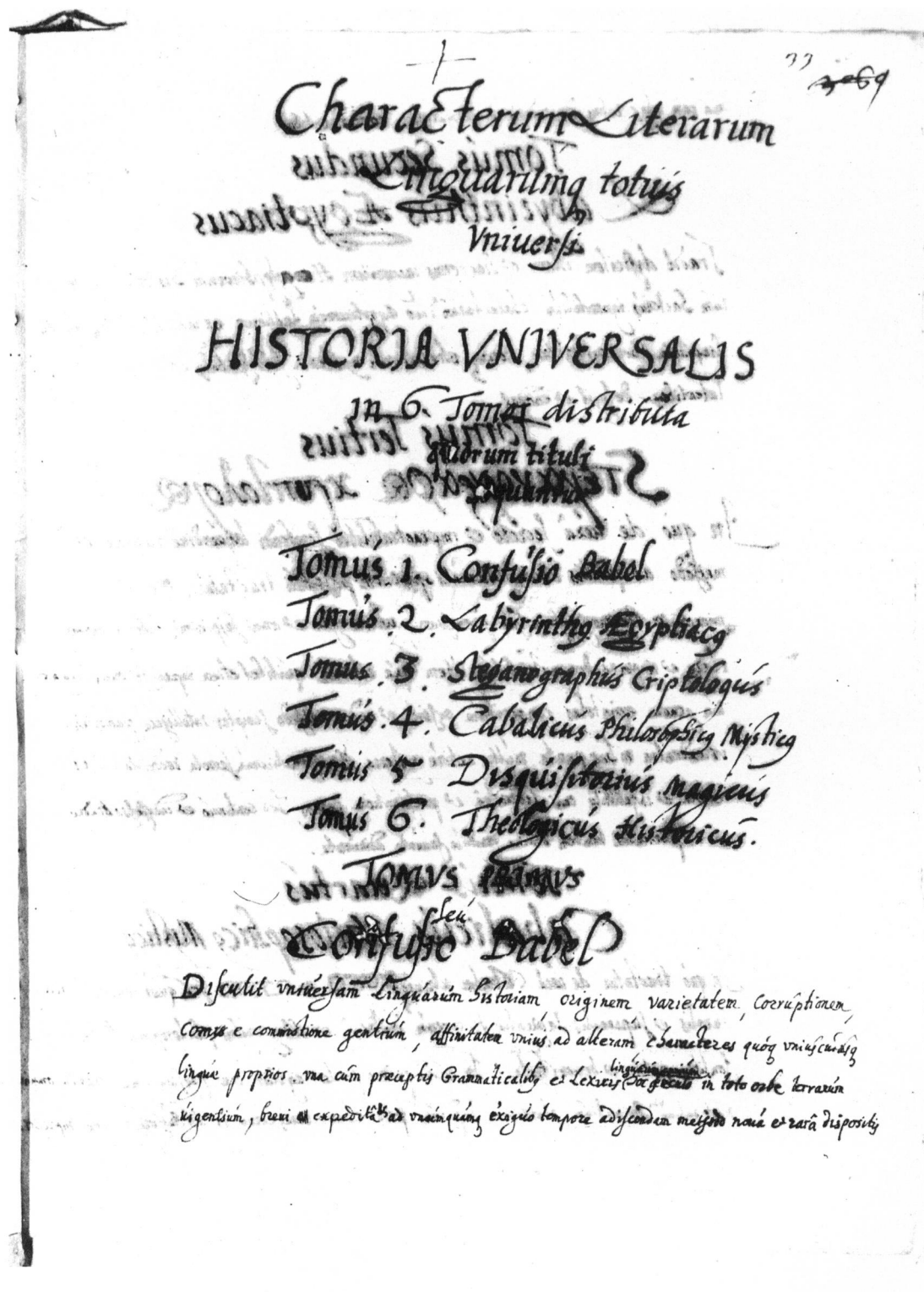


Fig. 1. Bibliotheca Apostolica Vatican, Barb. Lat. 2617, fol. 33r (photo © Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana).

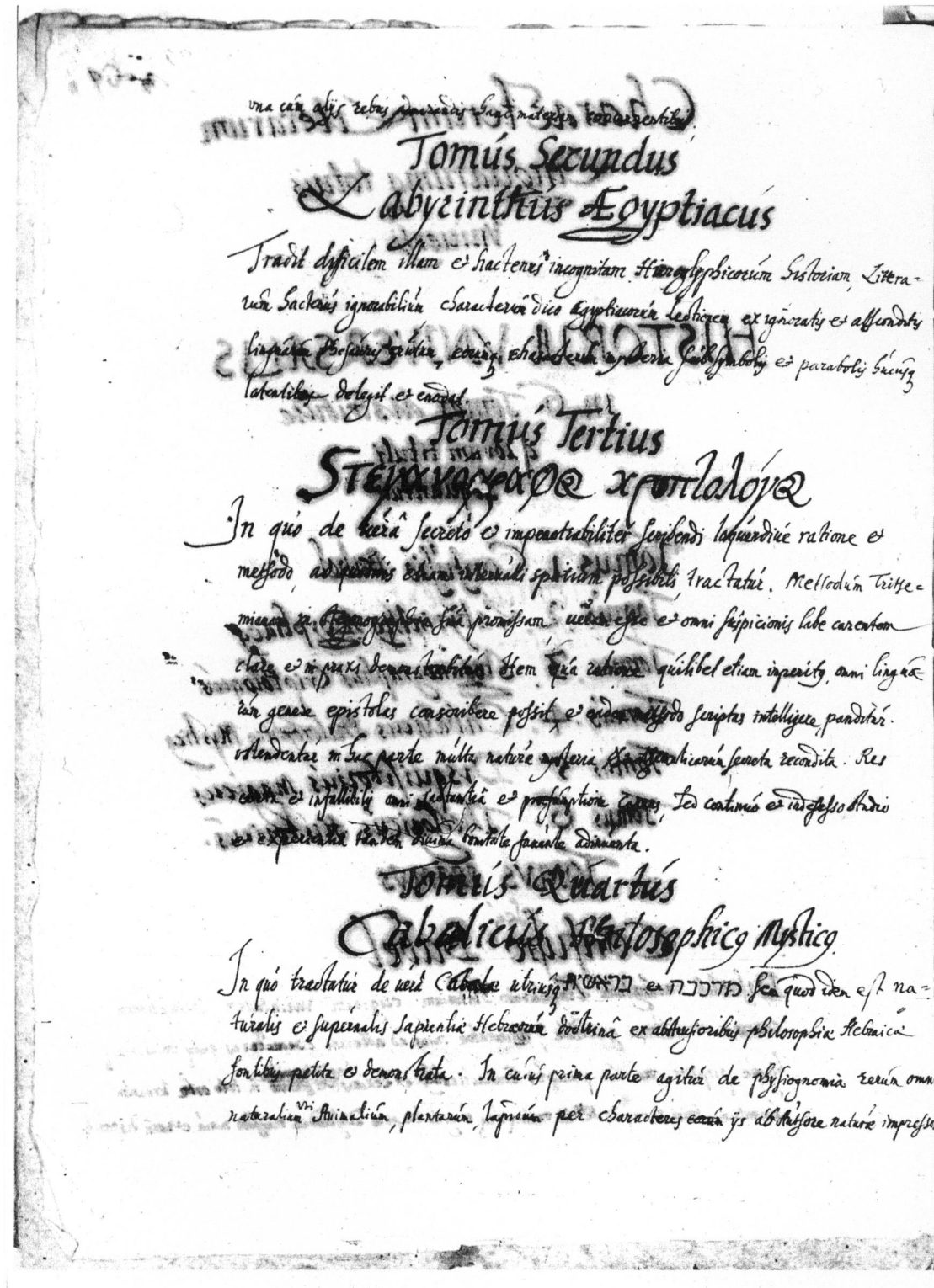


Fig. 2. Bibliotheca Apostolica Vatican, Barb. Lat. 2617, fol. 33v (photo © Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana).

74 705
 Translati in hoc parte quod de signaturis rerum omnium naturalium, Cabblicis, Chemicis,
 Botanicis, de 3 modis adme et dependentia multa curiose tractantur, cum explicatione
 facili, omnis Cabbale superstitio, adeo et spiritale. In 2da de habilita et mystica Hebr: Belgic.

Tomus Quintus Inquisitorius Magicus

In quo primo omnia superstitiosa characteristica Cabbale fundamenta concluduntur.
 A Chinitis figurarum, sigillorum contra Celerium, Gasterclum, Purgatoria, M. Celerum, aliorum
 Characteristicis expeditur; Amuletum ex Hebraeorum Arabum, Persarum, Perfarum,
 Indorum, Aethiopum, Europaeorum, affinis superstitiosis demonstratur, nullitas aperte de-
 monstratur. Raynardi Cabb. et nigra examinatur; nequissimi spiritus ostenduntur et faci-
 lem totius expunctionemque acquiescentiam.

Tomus Sextus Theologicus Historicus

In quo omnia divinationum secretorum fundamenta, quae Characteribus imitantur,
 ut sunt Astrologia, Geomantia, Chiromantia, Fendery, in partibus adeo et spiritibus, tum rationibus
 et Sistris, aurandi, tum ex illorum iure damnabilis, et rebus immensis, diabolica, illa-
 tionis periculis reperta, demonstratur, et representatur.

Omnia
 Ad laudem et gloriam Dei omnipotentis S.S. Romanae Ecclesiae, ubi libet, totiusque Reip. lator-
 eric bene, inoffenso Audio et libere, partem ipsam, amantissime, partem ex Latina, Graecorum,
 Hebraeorum, Chaldaeorum, Persarum, Arabum, Syriorum, Aethiopum, aliorum ecclesiis, huius-
 modi monumentis eritis, et in lucem prodita, a minimo seculo et minima societate vero Athanasio Kirke
 scripta, et a me, Athanasio Kirke, auctore, et a me, Athanasio Kirke, auctore, et a me, Athanasio Kirke, auctore.

Omnia ad maiorem Dei gloriam.

Fig. 3. Bibliotheca Apostolica Vatican, Barb. Lat. 2617, fol. 34r (photo © Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana).

Tomus Sextus
Theologicus Historicus

In quo omnia divinatoriarum scientiarum fundamenta, quae characteribus innituntur; uti sunt astrologia, geomantia, chiromantia similesque improbis modo usurpatae tum rationibus et historiis admirandis, tum ex utroque iure damnabiles et veluti innumeris diabolicae illusionis periculis refertae, refutantur, damnantur, et reprobantur.

Omnia

Ad Laudem et gloriam Dei omnipotentis, S.S. Romanae Ecclesiae utilitatem, totiusque Reip: literariae bonum, indefesso studio ac labore, partim propriâ adinventiône, partim ex Latinorum, Graecorum, Hebraeorum, Chaldaeorum, Persarum, Arabum, Syrorum, Aethiopum, aliisque reconditis Authorum monumentis eruta et in lucem prolata, a minimo servile e minimâ societate Iesu Athanasio Kircher Buchonio.

Omnia ad maiorem Dei gloriam.

[Text continues on next page.]

[fol. 34v; fig. 4]

Catalogus Linguarum omnium
de quibus in 1 Tomo
tractabitur.

[Along the left-hand side, written vertically from top to bottom:] Atque haec Linguae quae asterisco notantur, iam habentur, vel faciliè haberi possunt aliunde.

1 Classis Linguarum Orientalis doctrinalium	Classis 2 Occidentalium Ling: ortarum e latina.	Classis 3 Linguarum septentrionaliu[m] occidental.
+ Hebraea Mater	+ Latinâ mater	+ Germanica Mater
+ Graeca	+ Latina antiqua	+ Belgica seu Flandrica
+ Syra	+ Italica	+ Antiqua Saxonica
+ Chaldaea	+ Gallica	+ Anglica
+ Arabica	+ Hispanica	+ Scotica
+ Aethiopica	+ Lusitanica	+ Hibernica αὐτογενής
+ Armena	+ Sardoia	+ Suecia seu Gothica
+ Georgiana	+ Corsicana	+ Danica
+ Coptitica	+ Proventialis	+ Norwegia et Islandica
+ Samaritana	+ Sricula	+ Lapponica
+ Graeca vulgaris		

Classis 4 Linguar. Septentrion. Oriental.	Classis 5 Linguarum Meridional. Afrorum	Classis 6 Linguarum Indiae Oriental.
+ Sclawonica mater. + Turcica vulgaris + Moscovitica + Polonica + Lituonica + Illyrica + Bohemica + Hungarica αὐτογενής + Graeca vulgaris mater + Iberica + Bulgarica + Cypria	+ Maurica mater Fezzana et Barbara Aegyptiaca antiqua Abyssina mater Gilolana Congana Monomotapana Insulae S. Laurent.	Malabarica Moluccana Sina Mogolica Bengalarum Iavana + Persica Mogolica Hircana Sina Iaponica Tartarica Kirkassorum
	Classis 7 linguarum Indiae Occident. Amer: 	Class. 8. de linguis fictis certarum Gentium. &c.
+ Mexicana Novi Regni Floridana + Hyiana Cannibalum	+ Peruvana Brasiliana Chilana Canarica Septent: America	

[fol. 35r: blank]

[fol. 35v: written in lower left-hand corner:]

Suscepti Operis brevis Ichnographia seu idealis delineatio

[End of document]

TRANSLATION

UNIVERSAL HISTORY
of the Characters of Letters
and Languages of the whole world
divided in 6 tomes
whose titles follow

- Tome 1. The Confusion of Babel
- Tome 2. The Egyptian Labyrinth
- Tome 3. Cryptological Steganographic
- Tome 4. Kabbalistic Mystical Philosophical
- Tome 5. Investigative Magical
- Tome 6. Theological Historical

Tome One

or

The Confusion of Babel

Discusses the universal history of languages, their origin, variety, corruption, from the mixing of peoples, the affinity of one to another, and also the characters of each language; together with the grammatical rules and vocabularies of all languages flourishing in this age in the entire world, arranged briefly, efficiently, and by a new and extraordinary method for teaching anyone in a short time, together with other marvelous things relating to this subject.

Tome Two

The Egyptian Labyrinth

Treats that difficult and hitherto unknown history of the hieroglyphs, the reading of hitherto unknown letters, I mean the Egyptian characters, dug up from unknown and concealed treasuries of languages, and collects and explains the mysteries of their characters under hitherto hidden symbols and parables.

Tome Three

Steganographic Cryptological

In which is treated the true rule and method of writing or speaking secretly and impenetrably even across any possible interval of space. It is shown clearly and in praxis that the Trithemian method, promised in his steganography, is true and without any stain of suspicion. Also it is disclosed how anyone, even inexperienced in every sort of language, may write letters, and by the same method understand writing. In this section many mysteries of nature and recondite secrets of mathematics are revealed. This certain and infallible matter is without any boasting and presumption, but found out by constant and tireless study and experience with, finally, the favor of divine goodness.

Tome Four

Kabbalistic Philosophical Mystical

In which the true doctrine of the Kabbalah is treated, both *Bereishit* and *Merkabah*, or what is the same, the natural and supernal wisdoms of the Hebrews, derived and demonstrated from the most abstruse sources of Hebrew philosophy. The first part concerns the physiognomy of natural things, such as animals, plants, [and] stones through characters impressed on them by the Author of nature. Also treated in this part are the kabbalistic, chemical, [and] botanical signatures of all natural things; the order and dependence of the three worlds are treated very curiously, with however a refutation of all the superstitious Kabbalah now used by the ignorant. In the second [part], concerning the symbolic and mystical theology of the Hebrews.

Tome Five

Investigative Magical²⁸

In which first all the foundations of the superstitious Kabbalah of characters are demolished. The action of figures and seals is refuted versus Goclenius, Gaffarel, Burggrav, Mizauld, and other abusers of characters;²⁹ the invalidity of amulets taken from the superstitious workshop of the Hebrews, Arabs, Chaldeans, Persians, Indians, Africans and Europeans is clearly demonstrated. The great art of Ramon Llull is examined and a simple method for the easy acquisition of the whole encyclopedia is revealed.

Tome Six

Theological Historical

In which all the foundations of the divinatory sciences, which rely on characters, such as astrology, geomancy, chiromancy, and similar [practices] currently abused by wicked people, by admirable reasons and histories, and from both laws, are refuted, discredited, and condemned as stuffed with countless dangers of diabolical deceit.

For the praise and glory of omnipotent God, the advantage of the Holy Roman Church, and the good of the entire Republic of letters, with tireless study and toil, partly by my own invention, partly dug up and brought to light from [the memorials] of the Latins, Greeks, Hebrews, Chaldeans, Persians, Arabs, Syrians, Ethiopians, and other recondite memorials of authors, by the least servant from the least Society of Jesus, Athanasius Kircher of Buchonia.

All for the greater glory of God

[Text continues on next page.]

²⁸ The title, "Disquisitorius magicus," evokes the Jesuit theologian Martin Del Rio's influential *Disquisitionum magicarum libri sex*. Del Rio 1599–1600.

²⁹ Rudolf Goclenius the Younger (1572–1621), Jacques Gaffarel (1601–1681), and Johann Ernst Burggrav (fl. 1600–1629) all wrote on natural magic, including the controversial

weapon salve, which was the object of Jesuit attacks at this time. Antoine Mizauld (1510–1578) wrote on astrological medicine and is said to have written on astrological images. None of their works is late enough to help date Kircher's manuscript. See Goclenius 1609; Gaffarel 1629. On Burggrav, see Thorndike 1923–1958, 8:413–414; on Mizauld, Thorndike 1923–1958, 5:299–301, 327.

Catalogue of all the languages that are treated in Tome One.

And those languages that are marked by an asterisk [+] are already possessed or can easily be had from somewhere else.

1 Class of Languages of Oriental doctrines	Class 2 of Western Languages: originating from Latin.	Class 3 of North Western Languages.
+ Hebrew mother + Greek + Syriac + Chaldean + Arabic + Ethiopian + Armenian + Georgian + Coptic + Samaritan + Common Greek	+ Latin mother + Ancient Latin + Italian + French + Spanish + Portuguese + Sardinian + Corsican + Provençal + Sicilian	+ Germanic Mother + Belgian or Flemish + Ancient Saxon + English + Scottish + Irish αὐτογενής + Swedish or Gothic + Danish + Norwegian and Icelandic + Lapp
Class 4 North Eastern Languages	Class 5 Southern African Languages	Class 6: Languages of the East Indies.
+ Slavonic mother + Common Turkish + Russian + Polish + Lithuanian + Albanian + Czech + Hungarian αὐτογενής + Common Greek mother + Iberian + Bulgarian + Cyprian	+ Moorish mother Fesian and Berber Ancient Egyptian Abyssinian mother Gilolese [?] Congolese Mutapan Of the Island of St. Lawrence [Madagascar]	Malabarian Maluku Mughal Chinese Bengalese Javan + Persian Mughal Hircanese [?] Chinese Japanese Tartar Circassian
	Classis 7 of Languages of the American East Indies	Class. 8. on the invented languages of certain Nations &c.
+ Mexican Of the New Kingdom Floridian + Hyian [?] Cannibalean	+ Peruvian Brazilian Chilean Canarian South American	

Bibliography

ABBREVIATIONS

BAV Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana
 BNP Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris

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- Goclenius, R., *Tractatus de magnetica curatione vulneris* (Marburg 1609).
- Kircher, A., *Ars magnesia, hoc est, disquisitio bipartita-empirica seu experimentalis, physico-mathematica de natura, viribus, et prodigiosis effectibus magnetis* (Würzburg 1631).
- , *Primitiae gnomonicae catoptricae, hoc est, horologiographiae novae specularis* (Avignon 1635).
- , *Prodromus coptus sive aegyptiacus . . . in quo cum linguae coptae, sive aegyptiacae, quondam pharaonicae, origo, aetas, vicissitudo, inclinatio, tum hieroglyphicae literaturae instauratio* (Rome 1636).
- , *Ars magna lucis et umbrae in decem libros digesta* (Rome 1646).
- , *Musurgia universalis, sive, ars magna consoni et dissoni in X libros digesta* (Rome 1650).
- , *Obeliscus Pampilius, hoc est, interpretatio nova & hucusque intentata obelisci hieroglyphici quem non ita pridem ex veteri hippodromo Antonini Caracallae Caesaris, in Agonale Forum transtulit, integritati restituit & in urbis aeternae ornamentum erexit Innocentius X Pont. Max* (Rome 1650).
- , *Oedipus Aegyptiacus, hoc est, uniuersalis hieroglyphicae veterum doctrinae temporum iniuria abolitae instauratio, opus ex omni Orientalium doctrina & sapientia conditum, nec non viginti diversarum linguarum* (Rome 1652–1654).
- , *Polygraphia nova et universalis ex combinatoria arte detecta* (Rome 1663).
- , *Arithmologia, sive, de abditis numerorum mysteriis, qua origo, antiquitas & fabrica numerorum exponitur, abditae eorundem proprietates demonstrantur, fontes superstitionum in amuletorum fabrica aperiuntur, denique post Cabalistarum, Arabum, Gnosticorum, aliorumque magicas impietates detectas, vera & licita numerorum mystica significatio ostenditur* (Rome 1665).
- , *Ars magna sciendi in XII libros digesta* (Amsterdam 1669).
- , *Turris Babel, sive Archontologia, qua primo priscorum post diluvium hominum vita, mores rerumque gestarum magnitudo, secundo turris fabrica civitatumque exstructio, confusio linguarum, & inde gentium transmigrationis, cum principalium inde enatorum idiomatum historia, multiplici eruditione describuntur & explicantur* (Amsterdam 1679).

- Mylius, A., *Lingua Belgica, sive de linguae illius communitate tum cum plerisque aliis, tum presertim cum Latinâ, Graecâ, Persicâ, deque communitatis illius causis, tum de linguae illius origine & latissimâ per nationes quamplurimas diffusionem, ut de eius praestantia* (Leiden 1612).
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